

# Why mark the Jami Mental Health Awareness Shabbat (MHAS)?

This special Shabbat is an opportunity for us to encourage conversations on mental health, raise awareness of mental distress and share ideas on how to support ourselves and others within our community.

This year the MHAS falls on Parashat Vaera. In Parashat Vaera, Moses tells the Jewish nation that their woes have ended and that redemption is at hand. This should have been a time of elation, but the Israelites were too overwhelmed by their own stresses to absorb this message. They had lost hope and could not imagine a positive future for themselves.

Stresses in life may be inevitable but it is comforting to have hope that the future can bring our own personal redemption and in turn can bring us from darkness into light.

**It really is more important than ever to get involved in this vital initiative. Let's make our own mental health and that of our communities a priority.**



# What can you do?

**There are many ways that you, your synagogue, school, student group or youth group can get involved and each community or individual is free to mark the MHAS in their own way.**

This Toolkit can assist you in doing so - for example, by using one of the many sermons or activities provided or using the conversation points as part of a discussion group.

Some communities choose to arrange for members of their congregation to share their own lived experience or invite mental health professionals to lead a talk, discussion or panel event. Jami will also have a great programme of online events that you and your community can participate in. Please go to [jamiuk.org/mhas](https://jamiuk.org/mhas) for more details and to register.

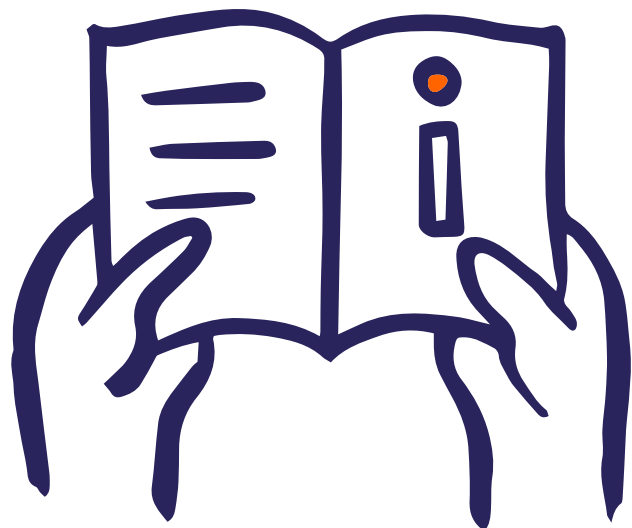
## Jami's educational courses & workshops

**There are a variety of mental health awareness courses and workshops, facilitated by Jami, that can be booked for your community throughout the year.**

You can host a Jami course or a bespoke learning event can be created for your community.

For more information, please go to [jamiuk.org/education](https://jamiuk.org/education)

For any further guidance or support or to let us know what you have planned, please email Laura Bahar at [laura.bahar@jamiuk.org](mailto:laura.bahar@jamiuk.org)



# Key facts on mental health

## What is mental health?

Mental health refers to our cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing - it is all about how we think, feel and behave. It helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.

Mental health also includes a person's ability to enjoy life - to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

## What is mental illness?

A medically diagnosable illness that can result from a number of factors, including biological or developmental. It can affect the way we feel, act and think and disrupts our ability to work or carry out other daily activities and engage in satisfying personal relationships. It can be managed through prevention, diagnosis, treatment and mental health recovery.

## What is mental health recovery?

Mental health recovery means being able to live a good life, as defined by the individual, with or without symptoms. It is a unique and personal experience that can have its ups and downs. Mental health recovery focuses on what a person CAN do rather than on what they can't. It is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Many people describe the need to persevere and to find ways to maintain hope through the most trying times.

## Parity of esteem

The principle by which mental health must be given equal priority to physical health. It was enshrined in law in 2012. The government requires NHS England to work for parity

of esteem to mental and physical health through the NHS Mandate. This has still not yet been realised.

## Key facts on mental illness

- One in six adults experienced some form of depression in summer 2021, compared with one in five in early 2021. (ONS, 2021)
- Rates of probable mental disorder increased between 2017 and 2021 in six to sixteen-year-olds from one in nine to one in six and in 17 to 19-year-olds from one in ten to one in six. (NHS Digital, 2021)
- In 2021, there were 5,583 suicides registered in England and Wales, equivalent to a rate of 10.7 deaths per 100,000 people. (ONS, 2022)
- In a National Union of Students poll of 4,000 students, 52% reported that their mental health had deteriorated or been affected negatively by Covid-19. However only 29% of those had looked for help. (NUS student survey, 2020)
- In a survey investigating how the Covid-19 pandemic affected Jews across the UK, a clear trend was seen with respect to synagogue membership. Mental distress is notably higher among those who are not synagogue members than among those who are. (JPR Hidden Effects Survey, July 2020)
- People with mental health problems are nearly twice as likely as those without to say they have felt unable to cope due to the rising cost of living. (Money and Mental Health Policy Institute Report, 2022)

# NHS 5 steps to mental wellbeing

Evidence suggests there are five steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing.

If you give them a try, you may feel happier, more positive and able to get the most from life.



## Connect

Connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.



## Be active

You don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.



## Keep learning

Learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. So why not sign up for that cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike?



## Give to others

Even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks.



## Be mindful

Be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

Practising each of the five steps to wellbeing every day can have a very positive impact on your mood and wellbeing. These are also things which are encouraged in the Jewish tradition.

The Five Ways to Good Mental Wellbeing & Judaism has been designed by Good Thinking in collaboration with Jami, in consultation with Rabbi Miriam Berger and Rabbi Daniel Epstein, with the support of The London Jewish Forum, Maccabi GB and the London Borough of Barnet.

You can read the full leaflet [here](#).



# Why social connection is the antidote to loneliness

**One of the many symptoms of mental health illness that we see is loneliness. Although many of us experience loneliness at one time or another, it's often overlooked or dismissed. Our society prides itself on self-reliance, so loneliness can carry a stigma for people who admit to it. (The Lonely Society Report, Mind)**

According to research, being lonely is associated with an increased risk in depression, anxiety and even cardio-vascular disease. When we experience mental illness, this can also exacerbate our loneliness as we get into a vicious spiral of loss, social contact and of feeling 'unworthy' to reach out to people. Either way, it seems loneliness can break our hearts and adversely affect our physical and mental health.

Isolation is not a choice. It's a consequence of loss and distress in our lives and adds to challenges with our mental health. Conversely, authentic and meaningful social contact can increase our confidence and

self-worth, lower our stress hormones and promote wellbeing.

So how can we combat this hidden health burden and bring back joy to ease our pain?

We can feel loved by anyone. We're not talking about romantic love but the love between us – person to person. We all have the power to share that feeling. Warm human connections, conviviality, camaraderie – these qualities make us feel good and may help us live longer.

Our communities, which are often organised around a synagogue but equally can be found in schools, sports clubs, special interest groups or university JSocs, might be a powerful social key to unlock the power of connection and health. According to Rabbi Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth: "A community is a place where you know you are welcome and if you are absent, you will receive a call to find out if you are well. In a community, you are not a mere statistic. You are appreciated and respected for being yourself." A report by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research on the mental health of the

UK's Jewish community confirms this view, suggesting that community membership offers a degree of practical support, welcome contact, opportunities to volunteer and, crucially, a general sense of purpose and belonging.

'Social capital' is a phrase that has been bandied about by politicians and lay leaders in recent years and refers to the value of social connection. It encapsulates how we feel about where we live, as well as those we meet. Capital is usually understood as the ability to use wealth to leverage privilege. However, social capital is not measured by finance but by people power. We can leverage social capital through our connections – by being with other people we trust and who respect and value us.

Jami offers social connection through our programme of online events and in person through our Head Room café and hub activities. Our Compeer befriending programme, which matches volunteers with service users, seeks to combine practical support with friendship to promote

independence and recovery while increasing social connections. Indeed, Jami's resources offer many individuals social capital – to those who use our services and those who offer them. We're a community and we need each other.

Rabbi Mirvis reinforces this view: "Across the UK, there's a great need for us all to play a part by investing in our local communities. Doing so can help protect our own mental health and can also contribute to an essential network of belonging, support and reassurance for all those who might be suffering intolerable pain and distress in silence. Such bonds of friendship can quite literally become a lifeline."

Indeed, we are all enriched by social connection and relationships. We're stronger together and can fuel and maintain social capital by kindness and action. So, leverage up your social capital and make those life-enhancing, perhaps even lifesaving, connections for others and for yourself. We have that power between us.

# Where to get help with your mental health

If you or someone you know needs mental health help there are a variety of options depending on the issue of concern.

- **Jami Qwell** – free, safe, anonymous mental health counselling and online support from the UK's leading online mental health platform. To find out more go to [qwell.io/jami](https://qwell.io/jami)
- **SHOUT** – 24/7 crisis text service – Text **Jami** to **85258**
- **Jami** is here to help with mental health support: [jamiuk.org/get-support/referral](https://jamiuk.org/get-support/referral), call **020 8458 2223** or email [info@jamiuk.org](mailto:info@jamiuk.org)
- **Ring your GP or out-of-hours service for an emergency appointment**
- **Contact your Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) if you have one**
- **Samaritans** – Call Samaritans on Freephone **116 123** (24 hours a day)
- Call the **Papyrus HOPELINEUK**, on **0800 068 41 41** or text **07860 039 967** if you are under 35 and worried about how you are feeling. Or call if you are worried about a young person.
- Call **999** or **NHS Direct** on **111** (England) or **0845 46 47** (Wales)
- **Jewish Helpline** on **0800 652 9249** (Sunday-Thursday, 12pm-12am; Friday 12-3pm)
- Don't hesitate to call **999** in mental health emergencies



# Conversation starters

**We all have mental health and it is just as important as our physical health. Starting a conversation about mental health is an excellent way to challenge the stigma and to get people thinking and talking about their perceptions of mental health and mental illness.**

**We have put together some suggested conversation points that can be discussed over a Friday night meal, Shabbat lunch or even a pre-Shabbat Zoom!**

1. Is mental health an important issue in your community? How does the community support our mental health or influence the way we think about it?
2. How does society view mental and physical health differently? Do you think the two should be addressed in the same manner? Why or why not?
3. What steps can be taken within your community to break down any stigma surrounding mental health?
4. In what ways do you engage with hobbies and interests that connect you with your community?





# Mental wellbeing and Judaism

The sources below can be used as a starting point to discuss how mental wellbeing fits into religion and culture. How does Judaism recognise the importance of looking after ourselves? What ideas from Judaism can we use to boost our wellbeing?

You may want to think about other textual sources or ideas in Judaism which support wellbeing e.g. trying to use technology less or not at all over Shabbat can boost our mental wellbeing by giving us a break from screen-time. This gives us time to maximise face-to-face communication or focus our time on other hobbies and activities we enjoy.

## A valuable lesson

“It is long past time for us all to break the silence and speak openly about mental illness. It is time for this last stigma to fall and fall quickly in the recognition that we are all created b’tzelem Elokim (in the image of G-d)” – Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, 2001

A key part of education is leading from the front. Just by educating about mental health we are raising awareness that we all have mental health and we need to look after our wellbeing to maintain it. We are role modelling the importance of looking after ourselves and teaching a valuable lesson.

## Do we have the concept of mental illness in Judaism?

*Prayer for the sick*

Refuat Ha’Nefesh, V’refuat Ha’guf / Healing the soul and healing the body

Judaism shows us a connection of healing the soul and healing the body; there is no division between mental and physical illness. There is only illness. Likewise, everyone has both physical and mental health which changes over time and needs looking after.

## Does Judaism help?

“The support individuals derive from the members, leaders and clergy of religious congregations is widely considered one of the key mediators between spirituality and mental health. Spiritual or religious support can be a valuable source of self-esteem, information, companionship and practical help that enables people to cope with stress and negative life events” - Mental Health Foundation, The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health.

Religion and culture can provide us with a sense of community and belonging. Within these communities we know that there are people we can turn to and trust when we need them.

## How does Judaism help?

*Pirkei Avot 1:6*

Aseh Lecha Rav, V’Kneh Lecha Haver

Make for yourself a Rabbi (teacher) and acquire for yourself a friend.

We all need someone to talk to sometimes, whether we turn to a Rabbi or Rebbetzin for guidance or a friend for support. Most of us will have a community, family and friends who we can turn to.

*Parshat Va’etchanan 5:12*

Shamor et Yom HaShabbat

Keep (Guard) Shabbat

However we choose to mark Shabbat, Judaism recognises the need to “switch off” from our busy lives and reconnect with those around us. Whether we find comfort in or feel connected to familiar routines and rituals or choose not to use technology for a while, these are great ways to boost our mental wellbeing.